

UTAH INTERAGENCY FIRE

Drones in Wildfire Scenes Put Lives At Risk

Putting lives at risk for a snapshot

1. Rotor systems on helicopters are very vulnerable to impacts by drones
2. Drone intrusions *always* result in automatic shutdown of firefighting aircraft.
3. Shutdowns put ground resources at risk as they depend of bucket drops.
4. Lives, homes and resources are put at risk during shutdowns
5. Pilots are not able to see drones, especially at low elevations
6. Aircraft move from one incident to another without warning as needed.
7. Even the most accomplished drone operators are not able to maintain safe distance.
8. 161 firefighters have died in wildland fire aviation mishaps. Aircraft already have inherent risks, drones multiply the danger.



Pilots flying the aircraft used on wildfires have a complex job. They must account for:

1. Low altitudes
2. Avoiding Terrain and Trees
3. Swinging Cargo and/or Buckets
4. Fire Personnel Below
5. Fire Behavior
6. Other Fire Aircraft
7. Full-sized Aircraft

Drones introduce an additional factor in an already complex situation where lives have been lost.

Criminal Penalties

Utah law prohibits the operation of unmanned aircraft over wildfire scenes. Mechanisms exist for legitimate users (media, utilities etc) to gain access.

Title 65A Chapter 3 Section 2.5:

- Drone is operating over a wildfire scene:
CLASS B MISDEMEANOR
- Drone causes firefighting aircraft to divert or drop outside intended area:
CLASS A MISDEMEANOR
- Drone comes in contact with firefighting aircraft:
3rd DEGREE FELONY
- Drone causes firefighting aircraft to crash:
2ND DEGREE FELONY

Any law enforcement agency can arrest and/or cite under the law.
(*Federal penalties also possible)



Drones compromise the safety of a number of different resources other than aircraft.

Law enforcement agencies may form task force response to locate and apprehend reckless drone operators. Response includes:

1. Identify access points drone operators may use near fire area
2. Set perimeter locations for setting up containment
3. Local 911 centers dispatch a task-force response
4. Task force members (Sheriff deputies, Forest LEOs, State Law enforcement and City Police Departments) receive instructions on specific checkpoints.
5. Task force members use air-attack platform, binoculars and radio communications to contain, identify and stop drone operator



Due to weight, aircraft carrying fire retardant **CANNOT** land without first dropping the payload.

